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THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

JUNE, 1912

THE BATAVIA PLAN AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS OF TRIAL

SUPERINTENDENT JOHN KENNEDY

In response to the request of the editors of the *Elementary School Teacher* for a special report on the present status of the Batavia plan in Batavia and the observed results of its use, I beg leave to submit the following. I have been very reluctant to speak about our own work. But I feel that such a request should not be disregarded.

The plan is in full operation here, and is well started on its fourteenth year of use. It may therefore be said to have stood the test of time. Its popularity at the outset was instantaneous. The people understood it at once, and applauded it. It never had to fight its way. It is a reform without martyrs. At present I see no abatement of its popularity, and we know of families that moved into town because of it.

Our plan has the two-teacher phase and the one-teacher phase. In rooms containing more than fifty children we have two teachers, one giving class instruction continuously to classes reciting alternately, and the other giving individual attention all the time to slow and backward children. In rooms containing less than fifty children we have but one teacher. But this teacher gives half her periods of time to the needs of individuals. This phase of the plan permits its extension and use under all conditions. It has furnished the solution for the problem of individualizing the high school. We have a general individual teacher in the high

school; and in addition to that each teacher there gives half of his or her periods to individualizing. This is the polity at present.

I have observed many and varied results springing from the use of this plan. Some of those results have been surprising, and all have been gratifying. I cannot hope to go into them all; but will mention some.

When a crowd are assembled it is either uplift or crush for the individual. We are confident that our plan has secured the inspiration and warded off the danger.

Where there is inequality of condition the crowd becomes a tangled mass. The attempt to move a tangled mass is overstrain. Overstrain has its inevitable goal in breakdown. Under our plan we believe there is no strain. Our teachers are becoming more vigorous from year to year.

Worry of any kind has its goal in breakdown, if not in death. And few people are aware how contagious a thing nervous debility is. Nerves are responsive to nerves. We feel that worry has been eliminated here, and that our children are calm, composed, safe, and vigorous.

Sanitation should be the first care of school management. Under our plan it seems to me that our schools have become not only sanitary but salubrious. That is, schools properly individualized become conducive to the recovery of impaired or lost health. I have come to feel that the "pale student" is a contradiction in terms. Energy is a red-blooded matter. If a student is becoming pale ask immediately what is the matter with the school?

Interested occupation is preoccupation; and all know that preoccupation in good things is the best safeguard against the approach of evil things. It is my belief that our plan tends toward absorbed preoccupation in the good work of getting an education. This is not only a negative safeguard, but it is also a positive promotive of character by supplying high aims.

I have implied already that our order and discipline have greatly improved. They have greatly improved; and it is the right kind of order; it is the order that not only permits business to proceed; it is the order that is an atmosphere that nourishes the

growth of character. Where energy is expended in securing a semblance of order, the same energy must be employed in maintaining it. There is tension that is depleting and depressing all around.

Our individual teaching has enabled us to move our grades. They do not now sink down by their own weight. Our children all move forward and arrive on time. The quick one no longer marks time; he sets the pace for the rest of them; and the rest line up on him. There is no longer any retardation. There is no longer any necessity for skipping grades in order to get on. We always allow an individual to gain a grade where it is to his advantage to do so. But there is a marked difference between *gaining* grades and *skipping* them. The gainer of a grade needs individual attention; and under our plan he gets it. Let no one suppose that the individualing is done only with children of questionable capacity. There are numerous circumstances that send our brightest pupils at times to the individual table.

It is here that we get the benefit of schooling. The child's first incentive is to line up with his fellows. When he gets the war-horse spirit in him his career is made. He works first for his line; then he works because of enjoyment in his work, and at last he works for grand remote aims. When his acquisitive powers are trained, and when he can see the goal of life, he may then work out his own salvation in the solitude of home. The soldier and the war-horse are trained to dress on the standard. And so it should be in schools. The school classes and grades should move forward in lines dressed at right angles to the line of advancement—no obliquity; no dragging; all crowding on the standard; and all champing the bit.

Can this be done? We are told that a Dobbin will never champ the bit, and that a Kentucky thoroughbred will fret himself to death if hitched up beside him. This is true. But it is also true that it is very dangerous to apply to human beings similes, metaphors, and analogies drawn from the brute creation. I have ventured on one such analogy; the analogy of a team, driving ahead, not necessarily at race-horse speed, but driving on a comfortably tightened rein. The Kentuckian does not want always to

be driven at the top of his bent; much less does he want to be held down to the sleepy pace of a Dobbin; but one crack of the whip that would incite Dobbin to a more respectable pace is more destructive to the thoroughbred than a dozen races. My experience with children is that they are not Dobbins; that they can be trained to be very good roadsters; and that Kentucky can travel with them without suffering the slightest discomfort or harm. I can remember the time when such a statement sent to me would need to be pretty well supported with data. And I should not now have the temerity to send such a statement unsupported. Under separate cover I have sent you transcripts of the promotion examinations record of every child in our schools.¹

No child has been promoted here as a favor; no child has been promoted here to get him out of the way and to let him drag upper grades until he can endure the process no longer; we meanwhile nursing the hope that his endurance will not extend to the high school. We have no "dead wood"; we have no *personae non gratae*; we have none on whose absence we could dote; we have nothing to make us inwardly furious; and we have nothing to explain away. Every child here has been promoted because he has shown, under a severe test, that he was ready for promotion.

You will observe that every child has passed the minimum; that nearly all of them have a comfortable margin beyond the minimum; and that most of them are hovering around the maximum. We could not get any such results until we resorted to individualizing. We should not have thought such results credible.

It may perhaps strengthen confidence in the integrity and searchingness of the examination to say that the questions for all above the fourth grade come from Albany, and that the examinations are conducted under regulations fixed by the state department. I have many reasons for favoring a strong state department; and not the least is that they make statistics of some value. Without statistics we have a war of words that tends to leave "confusion worse confounded."

One conspicuous result of our individual teaching is that it has enabled us to keep our grades intact. There is not an ungraded

¹The editors acknowledge the receipt of very full and interesting reports.

school nor an ungraded room in this town, nor is there a grade section. Grade section seems to me the first step toward grade dissection; in other words, the first step toward the ungraded school. Perhaps the ungraded school is needed but I do not think so. I do not think that we need to go back sixty years. The people of sixty years ago were not contented; they struggled for progress, and to some purpose; they gave us the graded school. And in my opinion they gave a contribution nearly as magnificent as *Magna Charta*.

Since we have been attending to the individual we have seen no necessity for disturbing our annual intervals and annual promotions. There is an advantage, I believe, in having the elementary grades conform to the practice that is universal in the secondary schools, colleges, and universities. The grading of the elementary schools was but an extension downward of the organization that proved so satisfactory in higher education. We are convinced that it obviates much confusion, and that it is better in every way to have a third-year child, for example, mean one thing and not two things. There is something gained, it seems to me, by symmetry and clearness. Furthermore, where the purpose is integration rather than disintegration a semiannual promotion is premature. We need the full year, and the children need the full year, in order to reach the best results.

A very noticeable result of our plan has been the remarkable expansion of our upper grades and high school. In a total enrolment of 1,750 there are over 850 in the upper seven of the twelve grades. In a total enrolment of 1,750 there are 375 in the high school and 125 in the eighth grade. Those eighth-grade pupils are practically high-school students, as they are all studying algebra and other high-school branches; so you may say without much exaggeration that in a total enrolment of 1,750 we have 500 in the high school.

And what those students are doing in the high school I look upon as a result of our plan. Like Plato, we have wanted something for education to hang itself upon. We did not want our education to be spineless or agglutinate, so we have required Plato's educational backbone, geometry. We require geometry and one or

two other things. But in the main our high-school course is elective. What our students have elected is quite significant of the workings of our plan. We believe most heartily in industrial education and have made ample provision for it. Every boy in this town has to put on the apron and every girl in this town has to put on the cooking cap and the thimble. We have, moreover, a very finely equipped commercial department; and we have a course in mechanical drawing and a class in agriculture. Our young people become very expert in their several lines of industry. I should be very sorry to see them satisfied with their industrial expertness. We all concede that it is incumbent upon the school to make the children good earners and providers. But the highest authority on vocational education in this country has formulated the matter thus: "Culture without industrialism is helplessness; industrialism without culture is brutality." Therefore I believe that industrialism should be taught only in the atmosphere of culture. A proper education implies immediate aims and remote aims. They should never in my opinion be divorced. Two kinds of schools are likely to generate two kinds of people, and two kinds of people are two armed camps. Civil order and peace would seem to require common ideals and a homogeneous training.

I do not say that those who choose remote aims always choose wisely; but I do say without fear of challenge that the mere fact that they have chosen remote aims is the highest possible compliment to them and to their teacher. The election in our high school has compelled us to provide extensively for cultural as well as practical work. And this is as it should be. The one makes the other virile and available; the other humanizes, refines, and ennobles the one.

It is only a corollary of the foregoing to say that our students are going to college in larger numbers and seeking the benefits of higher education. We have about fifty students in the colleges at present. And I mean the college of liberal culture as distinguished from the technical and professional schools. We have other numbers in those schools; and they all make quite a colony, or even a community on their home-comings. We have in college those who are in easy circumstances; and we have in college those

to whom a dollar has always been a large matter. We have sixty students in the graduating class of our high school this year. We have brought this phenomenal number to the threshold of the college; and I expect to see a large percentage of them enter in.

The school register is a good index of the efficiency and success of the school. A school must take hold in order to tend toward a maximum of registration and a maximum of average daily attendance. Our registers have shown a gratifying response to our plan. Whatever expands the aggregate registration and average attendance tends to reduce the per capita cost of education. We have been reducing the per capita cost since the introduction of the Batavia plan. But we have also been reducing the aggregate and actual cost by reducing the number of buildings, the number of janitors, the number of separate equipments, and other items. The reduction of expense has never been a motive with us. But it will be of interest to those who would like to compare the costs of different plans.

Our plan tends to the reduction of expense in another way. It has taught us the desirability of large classes. A large class under proper conditions is a powerful educational factor. There is a point of course at which a class will break down by its own weight. But the ordinary school cannot easily reach that point. The trouble with an ordinary school is that it has to have many classes that are too small. It seems to me a great pedagogical mistake to make small classes deliberately.

An efficient school has a tendency to approach the condition of a balanced school as to the sexes. Ineffective school work tends to make boys cheap. I like to see something like a boy-famine in a town; I like to see the owners of delivery wagons and other petty jobs concerned as to their sources of supply. I never did think much of the man-hunt that we read about in history; I think even less of the boy-hunt. The cheap boy sags down in school and he eventually sags out. It would be well for him if no one worse than the greengrocer got hold of him. When the hoodlum swarms in the street and infests public places it shows that boys are very cheap. The school is the Noah's ark for the immature boy. Of

course I mean this with a proviso. I can readily see how a school itself can cheapen boys. But this regulates itself automatically; the cheap boys will drop from its register.

We have not a balanced school as to the sexes; but I believe that we are tending that way. In an aggregate enrolment of 1,750 we have 850 boys; and 160 of those boys are in the high school. Last June we got out of balance the other way; in a graduating class of 32 in the high school 19 of them were boys. Now we would not intimate that the girls are of less consequence than the boys. But the girls are like the pounds—they are able to take care of themselves; the boys are like the pennies—they must be cared for.

I trust that no one looks upon the Batavia plan as a labor-saving device; it is rather a labor-making device. Our teachers and pupils are very busy; they have much to do to meet on time all the demands made upon them. But such is the law of the matter. There is no royal road to a generous and sustaining education. Work and sustained diligence are the price of education. Indeed, work and diligence are education in its best aspect. Let no one have any fears of work and diligence. If force, and strain, and unkindness, and bitterness, and cross-purpose are eliminated you cannot impose too much work and diligence; the well will get sick on worry; the sick will get well on and work diligence.

You will naturally ask what our experience has been with reference to atypical, defective, and subnormal children. I do not see any reason why we should not have our share of all kinds of unfortunates. I believe that we do have our full share of them. I refer you again to the promotion reports. If those were selected children the data would be worth nothing. Those are *all* our children. It must be acknowledged that many children are handicapped at the outset in many ways by mental and physical troubles. For such children there is no chance at all in the school that teaches only *en masse*; they are foredoomed. As to what can be done with them in the school that singles out the individual to deal with him according to his need, I must cite again the reports. To debate such a question academically and affirmatively would be a truly

fiery ordeal. I am convinced that you will find some who were very seriously handicapped among those whose records are by no means the lowest.

Any intelligent attempt at cure implies diagnosis. The mere calling of a lagging and backward child leads at once to a diagnosis of his case. It is often found that the mere calling was all that he needed. He was too far away; he did not see well, or he did not hear well. By the side of the teacher he both hears and sees; and he looms at once in his power. He is thereafter seated with reference to his infirmity; and his case is solved. With some it is a wandering and unmanageable attention that needs to be controlled and trained. With others it is a distressing nervous timidity which has been their undoing. Some have that woeful passivity and inertness so likely to mislead and discourage the inexperienced teacher; so likely to cause her to pronounce that fatal phrase, "born short," and to go on with the "go-on-ers." But we have seen the giant roused too often to permit ourselves to yield to discouragement. We have "learned to labor and to wait." And, by the way, we never have to wake a giant twice; when he once has realized his brawniness he never thereafter forgets it; he is never again a pygmy in his own estimation. Some are late arrivals in the room and need much adjustment. Others have been absent by reason of illness and have gotten out of touch with the work. Some are trying to make an extra grade. But whatever the cause may be, the teacher has become expert in detecting it, and has adapted the cure to the case. Cure in the grade is our plan. We are of the opinion that segregation should never be thought of. Possibly we might modify this view somewhat if we had upon us the full weight of life in the larger cities. But the very principle of segregation seems to me fraught with possibilities that are truly dire.

But would I not segregate the feeble minded and the incorrigibles? Yes, I would consent to the segregation of the feeble minded. But they segregate themselves; the number of hopeless defectives that present themselves for registration in a public school does not amount to more than a fraction of 1 per cent. That is not enough to constitute a problem in a town of only twelve thousand inhabitants. When one of those unfortunates

presents himself we register him and give him our best possible attention. And it does him good to mingle with normal children. He even learns something. No one will question the wisdom of segregating the totally blind and the totally deaf. But we have advanced stages of defective sight and hearing that are doing very well.

I am not quite ready to concede the segregation of the incorrigible. I am not quite sure that a school system needs something like a lock-up. I am quite sure that it would be very wicked to "run in" to that institution children who have never offended, children who have only suffered. The "bitter bread of banishment" was never designed for the innocent. And I need some further evidence to convince me that a strong grade is not the best place for an incorrigible.

The immediate goal of the individual teaching is to put the pupil into a condition to react against the sweep of the class, and to enable him to appropriate the benefits of class-membership and class instruction. Knowledge is not the aim at the individual table; it is power, initiative, vigor. It is not a taking of him off his feet; it is a putting of him on his feet. He cannot get his lessons at the individual table; he can only get his power there; so there is no coaching. This means, of course, that the pupil cannot offer himself as a subject for individual attention. Every pupil knows that he must recite on his own preparation. If he does not recite well his case receives such attention as it merits. A plan that aims at vigor puts no premium on laziness or cowardice.

Our individual teacher does nothing but ask questions. It is no refuge for an evader to run up against a questioner. No one is rendered weak or dependent by being asked a question. The question meets the needy one at a crisis of his life, and proves his salvation. The question picks him from in front of the car of Juggernaut; the question saves him from being a victim offered up to Moloch.

Justice is defined as the giving unto each human being his right. The rights of an individual are exactly coextensive with his needs. Needs, rights, and duties are correlative terms, covering the same exact subject or object-matter. Duty is what is *due* from us, and

what we *ought* to do is what we *owe* to do. If anyone suffers any restriction of his right someone is delinquent in the discharge of his duty. Someone is either *insolvent*, or he is disregarding of his obligations. Children have many debtors because they have many needs; but there are few on whom they have as great and as sacred claims as on their teacher.

My own convictions after fourteen years' experience with this plan are a result that may possibly be of interest. I offer them for what they are worth. I like our children as they are. I believe that they are susceptible of a fine education if we subject them to the dual process of individual attention and class stimulus. I believe that either of these processes will break down without the sustaining aid of the other. But in due combination I think they are invincible. But the combination, like other wholesome compounds, must have its quantitative formula. The combination of individual and class instruction that gives a potency is the proportion of one to one. It is a formula easily remembered. It is *HO* without any subscribed exponents or indices whatever. By *HO* combined in due proportion we live; by either taken separately we die. Believing as I do in the feasibility of universal education, I feel confident that our republic can endure, and that free institutions will remain the blessed possession of men.